



Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • www.scdhec.gov

Idling: Why it's a problem, and what you can do

What is idling?

Idling is leaving a vehicle's engine running while the vehicle is not in motion. Drivers are sometimes forced to idle in traffic, but in most situations idling is not necessary. Idling is merely a habit that drivers can break, especially when they realize how harmful it can be to health and the environment. Idling also costs vehicle owners a great deal of money.

How does air pollution affect health?

Idling increases the amount of vehicle exhaust in our air. Exhaust contains many pollutants that are linked to asthma and other lung diseases, allergies, heart disease, increased risk of infections and cancer and other health problems.

Air pollution hurts children the most. Their lungs are sensitive and still developing, and they breathe 50 percent more than adults. According to 2003 data from the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, about 91,000 South Carolina children have **asthma**. Vehicle exhaust can worsen and increase asthma symptoms. Asthma sends more children to the hospital than any other health problem and is a major cause of school absences.

How does air pollution affect the environment?

Vehicle exhaust contains air pollutants that are linked to ground-level ozone (or "smog"), acid rain, air toxics, climate change and other environmental problems.

How much fuel (and money) does idling waste?

Idling wastes fuel – and money. Vehicles get ZERO miles-per-gallon while idling. Larger vehicles tend to waste more fuel than smaller ones. Idling can also cause greater engine wear-and-tear over time, resulting in higher maintenance costs.

MYTH: *Frequent restarting is harder on the engine and wastes more fuel than idling.*

FACTS:

- Modern engines require much less fuel at startup than some people think. Idling for just **30 seconds** wastes more fuel than restarting the engine.
- Idling is harder on the engine than restarting. Frequent restarting causes only about \$10 worth of wear-and-tear per year, whereas idling leaves fuel residues that damage engine components and cause higher maintenance costs over time.
- Idling uses up to **½ gallon of fuel per hour** (although it varies depending on the type and size of the engine). It may not seem like much, but idling for a few minutes everyday can cost you several dollars per week.

MYTH: *Engines need to warm up by idling, especially in cold weather.*

FACT: Modern vehicles do not need warming-up, except in temperatures below 0 degrees Fahrenheit. In fact, idling in cold weather can actually be harder on the engine. The best way to warm up the engine is by idling for **no more than 30 seconds** and driving slowly for the first few minutes.

How can I reduce idling in my daily driving?

Here are some tips:

- If you expect to idle for more than **30 seconds**, turn off the engine (except in traffic).
- DO NOT turn off your engine in traffic or at stoplights, as this could be dangerous or annoying to other drivers.
- Steer clear of drive-through windows at fast-food restaurants, banks and drug stores. Park and go inside instead. If you must use a drive-through, turn off your engine while at the window.
- Waiting for someone in the parking lot? Picking up the kids at school? Turn off the engine in the meantime.
- Limit your morning warm-up time to 30 seconds and drive slowly for the first few minutes of your trip, even during winter.

TURN THE KEY – BE IDLE-FREE!

For more information, please visit:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) www.epa.gov
http://www.epa.gov/air/actions/drive_wise.html
<http://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus/antiidling.htm>

U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) www.eere.energy.gov
<http://www1.eere.energy.gov/consumer/tips/driving.html>

Fuel Economy Sites
www.fueleconomy.gov (EPA and DOE)
<http://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/driveHabits.shtml>

California Energy Commission www.consumerenergycenter.org

